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ABSTRACT

A six-phase preparation program, with two additional courses optional, that leads to recommendation for certification of elementary reading teachers ia described. The program begins with freshmen and allows the students to experience the elements of choice, responsibility, individualization, self-awareness, social awareness, and ccmmunication in the six phases which incorporate the 4 years of undergraduate training. The author feels that a concentrated effort should be made at the preservice education level instead of at the graduate level or through inservice programs. References are included. (NH)

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# "A Model of Pre-service Education of Elementary Reading Teachers"

## Pre-service Education

Since Commissioner James E. Allen proclaimed his now famous "right to read" phrase, reading people have been eager to join forces and capitalize on the Commissioner's interest in the field of reading. The idealism that surrounds the "right to read" words is commendable. Scholars and researchers are contriving strategies to make the decade of the seventies a period of fruitful gains for reading instruction.

Concern cannot help but surface about the focus of the current thrust. Effort appears to be concentrated at the graduate level and in-service programs. Perhaps concentration would better be directed toward pre-service education.

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Each year about 100,000 beginning teachers staff classrooms across the nation. Reading instruction for many of our children is directed by first year teachers who have had one or two survey courses in reading methods at the undergraduate level. The excellent experienced teachers of reading are very rapidly promoted out of the classroom. Compounding the problem are the Professors of Education who have lost their contacts with children. Frequently the most capable reading teachers are in the remedial reading rooms and clinics working with disabled readers. It is obvious that fewer clinicians would be needed if developmental reading programs were successful.

Designing and implementing an undergraduate program that guarantees even minimal success in teaching reading is not easy. College students' decisions to enter a program of teacher preparation are based on a variety of reasons. The degree of committment by students is affected by maturity and other personal factors. The amount of time available for adequate teacher preparation is limited. Institutional change is painfully slow. The planning necessary for gaining cooperation from public and independent schools is time consuming. Nevertheless, many of the teachers responsible for reading instruction in the elementary schools are the products of these restrictive conditions.

Accepting the challenge for designing a model of pre-service education for teachers of reading at the elementary level would suggest the following elements:

1. Choice - Learning to choose responsibly from an expanding range of options is developed through many opportunities. Opportunities should be available to the young child, to the college student, and to the experienced professional. Making rational and intelligent choices if further developed by a growing awareness and understanding of their consequences.

2. Responsibility - When a student is the active agent for his own learning, he makes a deeper commitment to a task. He tends to be more self-motivated and self-directed than he would be in a situation where the teacher alone is responsible for the learning.

3. Individualization - While providing opportunities for all learners to gain competencies, the educational program should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate itself to the needs of the students.

4. Self-awareness - Understanding of one's own origin, experiences, values, identity may be one of the most important characteristic of the effective teacher. It may also be the most neglected aspect of teacher preparation. Perhaps more than ever before, today's teacher must be aware of his own attitudes in order to deal competently with conflict, controversy, and confrontation in the school and community.

5. Social awareness - Only after some degree of self-awareness has been achieved can the student begin to reach out to other people. The person who knows who he is can more easily relate to the world in which he lives. His effectiveness in fostering learning is enhanced by his knowledge of anthropology, sociology, psychology and the other disciplines.

6. Communication - This is the principal vehicle of learning. Both the impressive and expressive acts of reading, listening, speaking, and writing occupy the prominent position of facilitating learning. Communication also embraces music, the visual arts, movement, dance, and all forms through which we relate to others.

With the acceptance of the six stated elements, a teacher preparation program has been fashioned to include opportunities for undergraduates to experience each element. Although, a recommended sequence of courses is offered, the program may be modified to meet the needs of the individual student.

Phase One. The initial phase of the program is based on the philosophy of choice. Freshmen eager to begin dealing with the realities of the adult professional world are welcomed into a Freshman Seminar. The students are organized into groups of twelve to fifteen participants.

Seminars are chaired by senior education teaching-assistants. The senior teaching-assistants work closely with the Education professor who is responsible for coordinating the teaching assistants. Participating in freshmen seminars is an important dimension of the seniors continuing professional preparation. The Teaching Problems Laboratory(1) is a simulated approach used by the teaching assistants. Specific topic problems are chosen by the seniors, including several topics on reading. Resources and bibliographies are constructed by them. Freshmen students choose to read and investigate a variety of sources to aid them in developing a repertoire of strategies to solve the critical incidents presented.

The coordinating professor conducts a number of the seminars. Beginnings of group interaction occur as professor and students explore the humanization of the schools and what it means to be a teacher. In-depth examination of the learning resources available for the student are studied. A solid base of research findings and literature, from which the student may choose to investigate during his program, is presented.

Mager's book on Preparing Objectives(2) is used for two purposes. First, it is used to help students to write objectives and to plan teaching strategies; secondly, to provide experience in using programmed material. Students are encouraged to devote one half day a week as a volunteer, serving as a teacher-aide in an elementary school. The primary thrust of phase one serves to help the freshman make thecchoice of a professional teaching career. It assists the education professors in counseling a student who may have questions about his committment or suitability for teaching. Simulation, group dialogue, field experiences, and introduction to professional reading all support the idea that decision-making and choice rests with the individual.

Phase Two - Sophomores, having made a choice to continue the education sequence, enroll in the Communication course. Historically, a course designed to teach students the process of reading and the language arts, it is now the unifying core around which the preparation program is structured. During this experience, each student examines and assesses himself through the scores on selected standardized tests which measure personality, ability, and reading achievement.(4) Precisely what tests measure are examined and their usefulness explored.

Evaluation by professors and individual students of life experiences which may affect his readiness level for teaching is accomplished through a comprehensive questionnaire and individual conferences. Competencies and skills are noted. Student and professor then chart experiences cooperatively determined, that the student may pursue. This procedure is the reverse of the more common practice of mechanically fitting students into neatly packaged programs. A decision is reached which determines the locale of the student's field experience through professor/student dialogue. Close alliance with elementary schools provide settings for field experiences. Professors spend portions of each week as a staff member within selected schools.

For many students, the strategy is to place him with an individual child. With the classroom teacher, the supporting personnel of the specific school, and the professor, the student develops a case-study with attending diagnosis of a child's strengths, weaknesses, and learning style. As the college student administers formal and informal measures, evaluates, converses with the child and the school personnel, the child's

current pattern of behavior emerges. The student then investigates the variety of resources available for determining the study program for the child. This program is carried out over a ten week period.

Students meet in one large group session on campus each week, at which time the professor brings relevant theory, structure, and additional resources to the students. Seminars are held with small groups of students in the elementary schools where they are doing their field work. Classroom teachers and ancillary personnel are invited and encouraged to attend the sessions, during which brainstorming, problem solving, and alternative techniques are offered and discussed.

Closely allied to the reading process are the other impressive and expressive arts. The program is not only concerned with listening, oral communication, and written communication, but embraces art, music, creative dramatics, and those tools which aid communication and understanding. Formal examinations are not given to the college student. During this phase of the program, he is expected to demonstrate commitment, stamina, maturity, and resourcefulness.

As the semester progresses, each student is responsible for an annotated bibliography of his professional reading. An expanding file of reprints, clippings, poetry, snapshots of projects, cassetts of lectures, discussions, and interviews, plus anecdotal records of meaningful incidents is started which sill be maintained throughout the preparation process.

A professional person is starting to take shape, not a shape that is carefully predetermined, but one that emerges from partnership of student, professor, classroom teacher, and child. Experiences that reflect the individual, his responsibility, his self- and other-awareness, his development, and his choices are all elements of the emergence of a teacher.

Phase Three - Second-semester sophomores, armed with a knowledge of self, the reading process, a child, an elementary school setting, and professional readings and experiences, now move to an area of ever-increasing concern--the preschool. Fortunate to have excellent facilities and personnel trained by the staff, the students form task groups to function with the young child. The preschool curriculum and philosophy is a result of two years of study, experimentation, and implementation.

A free, responsive environment provides students with the opportunity to observe children making choices and being responsible for their decisions. Special emphasis is placed on guiding students in observing and aiding children's language development. Labeling, recording dictated stories, story telling, dramatic play occur daily. Child behavior is carefully monitored. Intuitive intervention is first observed and then tried by students.

Another dimension of the program which is important in participation in a setting where in-service personnel are being retrained. The value of the interaction between young and mature students is yet to be measured but promises to present important findings.

Accompanying the field work, professors offer lectures, films, seminars, etc. on the development and the comparison of approaches to early childhood education. Students are led to discover the school as an outgrowth of a culture. Evidence of children's language facility as a predictor of success in school becomes obvious.

Phase Four - Juniors return once more to the elementary school level. The students generally choose a different school in a different neighborhood.

In the contemporary elementary school, students discover that children cannot successfully achieve in the content areas without specific reading skills. The higher order thinking and reading skills are reviewed and reinforced by the professor. Experiences are planned with the student to offer opportunities for them to teach small groups and whole classes in the content areas.

Micro-teaching with peer groups is video-taped to enable the student to analyze his procedures before executing the lesson with children. After confidence is gained by the college student, professor and peers are invited to share the tapes and offer suggestions for altering the strategies employed.

Units are written by individuals or teams of students. Interaction in seminars at the elementary schools continue with the students at various stages of preparation and faculties from college and elementary schools learning together.

Phase Five - Second semester, juniors with four semesters of experience in the field again join with faculty to evaluate individual progress. An area of interest is jointly chosen with the major responsibility for the choice carried by the student. Any relevant topic may be explored and a serious in-depth study is conducted by the student. Again, one half day a week is spent in yet another school setting and, by now, with children in the age range in which the student is most interested. If the independent study lends itself to a field experiment, it is conducted at this time. Seminars are held with professors to examine ideas, experiences, and points of view. Most students discover that success in the school for the child rests mainly with his achievment in reading.

Specific Approaches, Materials, Organizational Patterns, Interest, Poetry and other language art topics are just a few of the topics generated and field-tested. Occasionally, the college faculty recommends specific experiences or study to shore up any observable weaknesses.

Phase Six - Seniors engage in the traditional student teaching experience with some differences. Most students have chosen the age groups and specific school in which they would prefer to complete the minimum program requirements. The elementary school faculties and facilities are frequently familiar to the student. The transition to a full day in a known setting is easier than working in a new and unfamiliar setting. The total responsibility for teaching the class now rests with the college senior, with the exception of an afternoon per week which is devoted to seminars or other learning experiences.

In addition to the six phases of preparation which lead to recommendation for certification there are two elective courses provided.

Phase Seven - Since the college operates on a 4-1-4 calendar, students may elect to take the one month interim in Education. Reserved for juniors and seniors, the course is designed for cultural and social immersion. Stations are identified where instructional programs in reading are conducted on an Indian reservation, a migratory farm camp, and in a rural area of Appalachia. Several students form a team and spend three weeks living and teaching at a station. Armed with a small movie camera, a 35mm. single lens camera, and a cassett tape recorder students record experiences in the field. Upon their return to

campus, cross fertilization of ideas and experiences occur as students share their visual and auditory products with their peers.

Phase Eight - Second semester seniors who choose the challenge of teaching in an urban setting have the opportunity to enroll in a seminar which guides the student through a variety of experiences and encounters in school settings where racial tensions are high. Experienced teachers who themselves have been specially trained to teach reading to disadvantaged youngsters serve as a supporting resource teacher for the last phase of the preservice experience. Films, simulation, speakers from the black community and experiences with economic deprivation contribute to an awareness of life in the ghetto. Examination of motives, information, racist attitudes of both black and white college students is guided by a team of professors from both races. Thefinal reality which is "discovered" by the students is that the key to teaching in an inner city school is to help the children learn to read.

The model is still in the process of evolution. The education department embraces in part Margaret Mead's statement that our concern is not to direct students in "___what to learn, but how to learn and not what they should be committed to, but the value of committment." (3) The preservice program is in an urban community. It is a "becoming" project which cooperates closely with a neighboring university. Faculties and facilities are shared along with a shared desire to make a difference in teacher preparation in the resident city. Without the cooperation of the public schools and a selected independent school our field oriented program would not be "becoming".

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